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to the discussion of folk material as a living tradition*

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# Southern Folklore Quarterly

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## THE DISGUISED LOVER THEME AND THE BALLAD

by Robert M. Rennick

SCHOLARS OF FOLKLORE have long been concerned with the treatment of popular themes in ballad poetry. Countless works on the nature of the ballad have been written and nearly all have considered the stories that are told in the dramatic accounts of human emotions and experiences.<sup>1</sup> Nearly the entire range of thematic possibilities has been represented in some ballad or other in the English language. For the ballad of tradition, we find that any striking situation will serve as material as long as its appeal is based on the common human interests of the population in which it is found.

The largest number of popular ballads have to do with the personal relationship of men and women. Nearly half of all the ballads in the Child Collection<sup>2</sup> are stories involving the adventures of two or more persons engaged directly or indirectly in the affairs of the heart. Stories of true love rewarded, deceitful love punished, damsels in distress rescued by handsome lovers, emotions excited by betrayal and treachery and expressed by crimes of passionate violence have stimulated the folk for generations.

But it is this writer's thesis that one theme stands out before all others in popularity among the folk. This is the ages-old story of the warrior who returns home to test the faithfulness of his sweetheart by pretending that her lover is dead or disloyal, only to find the maiden resisting his advances by reminding him that she will ever be true to her lover. Only when his disguise is removed or a love token produced,

<sup>1</sup>Gordan Hall Gerould. *The Ballad of Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932 (Chap. 3).

Francis B. Gummere. *The Popular Ballad*. Boston, 1907 (Chap. 2).

W. Roy MacKenzie. *The Quest of the Ballad*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1919 (Chap. 7).

Evelyn Kendrick Wells. *The Ballad Tree*. New York: Ronald Press, 1950 (Chap. 4).

<sup>2</sup>Francis James Child. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Boston, 1882-1898.

does she realize the identity of her suitor who is apparently satisfied with her fidelity.

This story is probably second only to the *Maid Freed From the Gallows* in its spread throughout the world. Versions of the *Returned Lover in Disguise* have been found in such widely-scattered places as Belgium, Greece, Germany, and Scandinavia, all of the British Isles and the United States and Canada. Undoubtedly if such collections were available, we would know that the folklore of Oriental peoples, the Aborigines of Australia, and the Negro inhabitants of the Dark Continent contain variants of this theme.

It has been the writer's goal to trace the variants<sup>3</sup> of the *Disguised Lover* theme throughout the ballad lore of the English-speaking world. He has sought his material in the many published collections of British and American folk ballads, through correspondence with several dozen of the country's leading ballad scholars (to whom his deepest gratitude is hereby expressed) and by reference to his own humble but growing ballad collection.

In the course of his work, the major elements of the theme have been analyzed, artistic and continental variants traced, and each of the twenty-five discovered variants described in considerable detail as to geographic spread, historical development, theme, and significance.

The present paper may serve as an introduction to the more extensive study made by the writer. The major elements are herein discussed and a brief analysis of the origin, significance, and geographical distribution of the theme are given.

### MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THE THEME

Several elements are characteristic of the ballads conforming to the *Disguised Lover Theme*. In the first place, our hero, who is usually a soldier or sailor, returns home after an absence of three, seven, or an indefinite number of years, and seeks to discover whether the maiden he has left behind has remained faithful to him. In order to test her loyalty, he pretends to be a stranger and approaches her with a romantic proposal.

<sup>3</sup>Throughout this paper, the following distinction between the terms *Variant* and *Version* will be made. By *variant*, this writer will refer to the 25 ballads that appear to be related to each other in terms of their common incorporation of some of the elements of the *Disguised Lover Theme*. By *version*, will be referred the individual appearances of each ballad variant in regional collections.



There seems to be little agreement among the variants of our theme as to how the hero manages to hide his true identity from the maiden. In at least four versions (*Johnny Germany*, *Mary and Willie*, *The Banks of Claudie*, and *The New Slain Knight*) the returned lover appears in an actual disguise; in one as a beggar, in another behind a mask, while in the others, no particular disguise is mentioned. In other variants, the "dim light of evening or the shadows of night"<sup>4</sup> prevent the maiden from distinguishing his features. Most of the ballads, however, suggest that after an absence of, in some cases, as long a time as seven years, considerable alteration in his appearance has taken place. At any rate, we are led to assume that his appearance is not sufficient to affect her recognition.

Upon hearing his proposition—in nearly half the cases, an explicit proposal of marriage, while in others, such a relationship is probably intended—the maiden reminds the gentleman that she already has a lover of her own. And although he is off to the wars, on the seas, seeking his fortune in America, or pursuing some other adventure, she is certain that he will return to her.

Whereupon the stranger seeks to dissuade her from her course of constancy by suggesting that her lover may have been killed in the war, is lying neglected on some distant battlefield, or has possibly drowned in the ocean. Often he pretends to have been a friend or acquaintance of her lover and relates a tale of courage and heroism which unfortunately has resulted in his death. Or even more disheartening is the possibility that her lover has betrayed her and has settled down in marriage with some other young maiden.

Our heroine responds to these various tales with mixed emotions. As a poor, defenseless female—typical of most of the ballads in this collection—she registers immediate grief, expressing in her recognizable sorrow her determination to remain loyal to her lover even in death.

In most variants, the maiden simply resigns herself to the possibility that what this stranger has suggested is true. If her lover is dead she will mourn for him, if he has married someone else she will wish them both well. But as he is the only lad she has ever loved, she can never marry another.

In one variant—the *Dark-Eyed Sailor*—the maiden's reaction is one of rage. To his suggestion that she forget the lover as one man is only as good as another, she whips out a dagger and in the heat of her

<sup>4</sup>W. Roy MacKenzie. *Ballads and Sea Songs From Nova Scotia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928 (P. 168).

passion, berates the stranger, insinuating that he is an unmitigated scoundrel for advising her to forsake her lover.

The writer knows of no versions, however, in which the heroine does not naively accept the fabricated account of her lover's death or disloyalty. She evidently makes little effort to check on the veracity of his account and contents herself merely that it could not possibly be false.

In some variants—*William Hall* among them—the maiden is asked to describe her lover. To this she usually responds by some vague indications of his general appearance. (Love is blind to accurate description). The stranger immediately acknowledges familiarity with her lover—he was usually a comrade in the same military detachment—even mentions his name (which is probably all the proof of the veracity of the account the maiden requires) and then proceeds to describe his death from battle wounds.

Several ballads include a very vivid account of the "death" of our hero as related by the stranger who pretends to have known him on the field of battle. In *The Mantle So Green*, the lover, William O'Reilly is his commander, who in his last dying breath is heard to sigh that if his lovely Nancy were with him he could die contented. *William Hall's* life is brought to a courageous end by a French cannon ball passing through his body. *George Reilly's* death represents the finest integration of these two elements—the French cannon ball and the "farewell, dearest Nancy." A cannon ball is also shot through *Billy MaHone*, *Dennis Ryan (Janie of the Moor)*, and the hero of *the Midst of Night*. Ione's ship (*The Banks of Claudie*) has been wrecked off the coast of Spain; a French soldier takes the life of William Smith of *The Plains of Waterloo*; Willie Brown is drowned with all but 32 of his shipmates on the vessel: *The Lady of the Lake*; the body of *the New-Slain Knight* lies on his father-in-law's property.

Sometimes the reverse procedure takes place, in which the stranger describes the lover, the maiden affects recognition and is overjoyed at hearing word of him, and then his death is described with a drastic alteration in her emotions.

In several versions there is no pretence on the part of the stranger of the death or disloyalty of the lover. In the *Dark-Eyed Sailor*, for example, he simply commands the maiden to forget about him, reminding her that one man is as good as another.

By this time, our hero is more than convinced of the faithfulness

of the maiden he has left behind. He now proceeds to reveal his identity and announce his return to make her his bride. Various are the means by which his identity is disclosed.

It was long a custom among departing lovers to exchange rings or love tokens as remembrances. It will be recalled that in *Hind Horn* (Child #17) the maiden gives her departing lover a ring with the warning that should its color turn pale, he will know that their love is in danger and he must return home immediately.

In some instances, a single ring or token was broken in half and shared by the lovers. Recognition is thus effected in most of the variants of *The Disguised Lover* by the hero's production of the ring or token or his half of it.

In other versions, where no ring or token had been exchanged, the hero's identity is revealed by removing his disguise (as in *Mary and Willie* and *The Banks of Claudie*). In several versions, he simply tells her who he really is and she apparently accepts this with as little hesitancy as she had earlier accepted the story of his death. In at least one variant known to the writer, she does not immediately accept his revelation until the ring is produced (*Seven Long Years*, a Nova Scotia version of *Pretty Fair Maid*). Several variants, on the other hand, do not indicate the means by which recognition is effected.

After he has revealed himself to his lady, our hero proceeds to make up for lost time. Through embrace or by verbal troth, he rededicates his love and explains that the pretence was merely to test her loyalty and continued devotion. He commends her for it saying he has never found anybody else who has ever been as true as she. He promises that henceforth he will forsake his life of adventure and never again depart from her.

There is only one case known to the writer in which the maiden appears to have resented the necessity of such a test: ("Oh my loving Johnny, hy did you grieve me so?"—*Johnny Germany*.<sup>5</sup>) In all the other variants, she calmly accepts the fact that her constancy had been in question.

Finally, in some versions of our theme, the hero and his lover join hands and proceed to the local church where they are united in wedlock.

An interesting variant on the theme we have just analyzed may be found in the *Mary and Willie* ballad in which the stranger appears in

<sup>5</sup>Iolo Williams. *English Folk-Song and Dance*. London: Longmans, Green, 1935 (Pp. 66-67).

the disguise of an old beggar and relates to the maiden that though her lover still lives, he is in desperate poverty and cannot return to her in that manner. The faithful maiden expresses great joy at hearing that Willie is still alive and although he is poor, he is still welcome to her and she will have no other. Whereupon, Willie, removing his disguise, reveals his true identity and explain the necessity for the test.

In one of the six modifications of the basic *Returned Lover* theme listed by Splettstösser (*Der Heimkehrende und Sein Weib*—Berlin, 1899), the hero returns and declares that, though in great poverty he has come to claim his sweetheart and asks if she will be his bride. She professes her continued loyalty, he flips off his rags, reveals his newly-acquired wealth, and they live happily ever after. (The hero reveals such newly-acquired wealth in three of the variants in this study: *The Prentice Boy*, *John Riley*, and *Cairn-o'-Mount*.)

#### SPECULATIONS AND ANALYSIS OF BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS & A BRIEF VARIANT-SUMMARY

At this point it would do well to speculate about the reasons for the some of the behavior of the characters of the ballad theme and its several variants. In the first place, one may well wonder that the heroine of our story had ever bothered to remain faithful at all. Exceedingly few women can be expected to endure celibacy for seven, or even three years of their life. The "war widow" is indeed a remarkable person.

Scarborough suggests that the lack of available manpower in the home community during wartime kept maidens loyal to their men overseas. But this does not explain why this loyalty should remain steadfast when a handsome stranger—as we assume our hero to be—presents himself at her front door. Perhaps, says the late Mrs. Scarborough, it was the "prevailing notion of the time that a woman who once loved must never forget. No matter if he has gone for years . . . and if he has omitted to send any message to her during his absence, she must remain loyal. He may be dead . . . but not even a grave can absolve her of her promise to marry him. His ghost stands stubbornly in her mind to keep out any successor. Such emotions . . . were very real in earlier days—at least in song . . ."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Dorothy Scarborough. *A Song Catcher in the Southern Mountains*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1937 (Pp. 259-60).

And that they continue to be real today among real flesh-and-blood people may be suggested by a letter the writer received several years ago from the late Henry W. Shoemaker, President of the Pennsylvania Folklore Society in which he tells about the one-armed supper club singer from the Pennsylvania mountains who resisted the charms of six young men in loving devotion to a man who would never consent to marry her.<sup>7</sup>

Returning chronologically to the time preceding the hero's absence and the situation occasioning his departure, we find that military obligations, adventure-lust, and disagreeable parents were all responsible in the several variants for the couple's separation. Most ballads, however, do not explicitly describe the separation of the lovers or their reasons for it, although most, by implication, suggest that the hero had been called to combat duty in the service of his country.

In over 80 percent of the versions known to the writer, a soldier or sailor returns home from the wars. He is either described as such by the narrator or his identity is implied by the heroine who speaks of her lover as "a valient sailor." Or the stranger may ask if the maiden would be willing "to be a sailor's wife." Of course, in some versions, the title itself indicates his military occupation—as in "*The Dark-Eyed Sailor*."

The sailor-hero identity appears to be more common than that of the combat soldier. British variants and those from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia tend to have their hero a sailor. American variants, on the other hand, are more evenly divided. In one ballad—*The Pretty Fair Maid in the Garden*—the hero is sometimes one and sometimes the other.

In the days when military service was not required of all able-bodied males, one may well wonder what "her true lover" was doing in the service of his country, or whoever's country he was serving. Why did he leave her in the first place? Perhaps this will be one of the great mysteries of modern times, although in several variants it is explicitly mentioned that our hero was impressed into service on the seas (as in *The Prentice Boy* and *The Wealthy Farmer's Son*.) The thought arises, of course, that the lad, typical of the youth of his day, might have been carried away by the lust for adventure, expecting to find thrills and excitement in military service.

In at least two versions of *The Pretty Fair Maid*, the returned lover is a cowboy. In another ballad variant, he is a merchant. In

several variants his occupational identity is not mentioned at all, let alone the reasons for his departure.

At least two variants—*William Hall* and *The Prentice Boy*—preface their rendition of the familiar theme by relating how the parents of one or the other lover in protesting their mutual affection send the lad out of the country. In *The Prentice Boy*, he is bound over to a wealthy merchant as a waiting man, and by his good service, rises in the ranks to the position of steward of the merchant's company.

In several versions, explicit disapproval of their relationship causes the lovers to take their final departure in secret. Cupid's Garden is the scene of their farewell in *The Prentice Boy*. In her father's garden, the heroine of *The Mantle So Green* tearfully separates herself from her soldier lover. The actual leave-taking before departure is described in only three variants—*The Prentice Boy*, *Mary and Willie*, and in some of the *William Hall* versions. In the other variants, such farewells are only implied.

The length of their separation also varies among the different variants. In most of those known to this writer, seven years is the period of our hero's absence from his true love. In one version, seven years or more elapse. In 35 percent he is gone for "seven long years." Three years and/or more account for at least a half dozen absences. Several of our lovers are separated for "four years and past," two years, "six months or better," and one has departed "nearly ten years ago." One absence is "for the years past." One is simply "for many a day." Four maidens wait on a "young farmer who has lately gone to sea," while an additional one waits for "a rich young farmer who has lately gone to the wars." In over 40 percent of our versions, however, no time lapse between departure and return is specified.

A word or two must be said about the circumstances of the two lovers upon the hero's return. In some of the variants, we assume, although it is not explicitly stated, that the hero calls upon the maiden at her home and the dialogue between them occurs at her front door. In some of the versions of *William Hall*, the heroine is found walking alone in her garden. The *Banks of the Claudie River* (in Ireland) forms the setting for the meeting between Betsy and her Johnny. The heroine of this tale has been wandering about the countryside in search of her true lover and has become lost. When she inquires of the stranger the direction of the river, he replies that it is on its banks that she now stands. *Fair Phoebe*, *Janie of the Moor*, *Sallie of*



*The Plains of Waterloo*, *Beautiful Nancy*, Liza Gray (of the *Lady of the Lake*), Miss MacDonald (of *Glencoe*), Nancy of *The Wealthy Farmer's Son*, and the heroines of John Riley, *The Banks of the Brandywine*, and *The Mantle So Green* are also found walking or resting by a stream or in a meadow. The wife of *The New Slain Knight* is found sleeping near a hedge in her father's garden. *The Pretty Fair Maid* is also found out in her garden or down by her front gate.

In many variants, the hero is introduced as taking an early morning stroll or an evening constitutional, to seek the "sweet and pleasant air," or a walk along the shores of a river in which exercise he comes upon the presence of the maiden and pursues thereon the theme of the ballad.

Since the theme of the ballads as well as most of the variants themselves have come to the new world from the British Isles, it is probably safe to assume for them a European rather than an American setting. In two variants, at least, the hero is mentioned as having returned from somewhere in America. (John Riley specifically mentions Pennsylvania, and in one version, California.) The *Claudie River* may be found in Ireland lending some credence to the belief that in that country lay the origin and setting of this particular variant. In the *Waterloo* group of ballads (*Plains of Waterloo* and *The Mantle So Green*), moreover, the soldier-hero is described as having been killed by a French cannon ball. The British are known to have fought the French at this famous Belgian landmark. (George Riley and William Hall in the ballads of the same name are also cited as having been victims of encounters with the French.)

#### CHARACTERIZATION

Our hero is referred to by a number of different names. Two, however, seem to stand out beyond the others: William and its diminutive Willie and Johnny, John, or Jack. There was a William Hall, a William Smith, a Willie Brown, a William O'Reilly, and a William O'Roley (in the ballads—*William Hall*, *Plains of Waterloo*,

<sup>1</sup>In addition, the *Lady of the Lake* is said to have sailed from Greenwich Town (England) with 500 immigrants bound for America. In *A Seaman and His Love*, the hero speaks of his having "fought for old England's glory." The *Glencoe* versions speak of a powerful French adversary who must be overthrown before the hero will be able to return to his love. And at least eight variants have been discovered only in the British Isles.

*The Lady of the Lake*, and *The Mantle So Green*, respectively.) There is a *John Riley* and a *Johnny Germany* or Jack the German in the ballads of the same name. Thomas Hall (*William Hall*), *George Reilly*, *Donald MacDonald (Glencoe)*, *Billy MaHone*, and *Dennis Ryan (Janie of the Moor)* are also heroes of *Disguised Lover* variants. In addition, there are anonymous Willie(s), Donald(s), Henry(s), Jamie(s) and Jemmy(s). Unusual names such as Charlot, Ione (John-?), and Sakmush (minstrel) are given to the hero of the *Banks of Claudie*. In a number of variants, no name at all is mentioned.

The faithful maiden bears the poetically simple names of Nancy, Betsy, Sally, Polly, Janie, and Mary. In one variant she is Liza Gray (*The Lady of the Lake*). In another she is the Fair Phoebe (*The Dark-Eyed Sailor*). She is also Betty, Annie, Molly, Jennie, Flora, and Bessie.

The most popular combinations of hero and heroine are *William (ie) and Mary*, *William and Nancy (The Wealthy Farmer's Son and The Mantle So Green)*, and *Johnny and Polly (Johnny Germany)*. *William Hall* is paired off with Mary or with Mollie. *John Germany* with Pretty Polly, *Fair Phoebe's Dark-Eyed Sailor* is generally Willie or William. Betsy and Ione are paired, as are Betsy and Johnny (both from the *Banks of Claudie*), Annie and Willie (a version of *Mary and Willie*), Nancy and Jamie or Jenny (*Beautiful Nancy*), and Betsy and Sakmush (*Banks of Claudie*). Billy MaHone's true love is a Mary. Dennis Ryan loves *Janie On the Moor*. Sally waits for William Smith (*Plains of Waterloo*) as Liza Jane does for Willie Brown (*The Lady of the Lake*), Flora does for Donald MacDonald (*Glencoe*), and Nancy does for William O'Reilly or O'Roley (*The Mantle So Green*.)

### BALLAD STYLE

The considerations of ballad style would involve us in some highly technical discussion of form and structure for which the writer is not prepared nor in which is he particularly interested. Suffice it to say, at this point, that the ballad variants with which we are concerned represent nearly all the variations found in the form and structure of the romantic ballad.

In every case, the story unfolds through a series of marked episodes: the appearance of the stranger, his proposition of marriage,



the heroine's rejection, either the story of her lover's death or defection or a suggestion of it, the revelation through the production of the ring or the removal of the disguise, the acceptance on the part of the heroine, and the final dedication of their love and devotion.

The use of dialogue, which is central to the style of every ballad—variant and version—of this theme, is most effective in the presentation of the story. In several variants, the dialogue between the two lovers is to be found throughout. In others, there is a combined dialogue and narrative. The narrative is given in both the first and third persons. In some instances, the hero himself does the narrating; in others the narration is done by the objective bystander in the impersonal manner characteristic of most folk ballads. In only one or two instances known to the writer does the heroine do any of the narrating (and in these cases, only in parts of the ballad). Frequently, as is also the case in many of the other traditional ballads, the narration of a single version is performed in all of the ways here set forth.

Incremental repetition is the device effectively employed in the dialogue between the stranger and the maiden over the possibility of her lover's death or disloyalty. From a recorded version of *The Pretty Fair Maid In the Garden* such a device may be illustrated:

"Perhaps your love he is drowned,  
Perhaps he's in some battle layin',  
Perhaps he stole some pretty girl an' married,  
You'll never see your love again."

"Ef he's drowned, I hope he's happy,  
Or ef he's in some battle layin',  
Or ef he stole some pretty girl an' married,  
I love the girl that married him."<sup>8</sup>

Only two versions, to the writer's knowledge, contain a refrain in the accepted sense of its usage. In both cases, contrary to precedence, it serves to further enhance the development of the story. In *Carin-o'-Mount*, the maiden sings the refrain to emphasize her continuous devotion to her lover, Donald. The same is true in *Fain Waterloo*, a version of *The Mantle So Green*, although in this ballad, unlike the other, the same refrain is used throughout.

As is typical of all folk ballads, rhyme is used in the variants and

<sup>8</sup>Commercial recording by Cousin Emmy Carver, Decca Records, American Folk Music Series, Album No. A-574, 1948.

versions of our theme. The rhyming scheme varies from version to version but the abcb quatrain is found most frequently. Nowhere has the writer come across a version expressed in rhyming couplets.

Aside from the obvious great similarity in the stories from variant to variant, one may observe considerable affinity in the verbal expression of the story as found in the several variants. Common passages of description and dialogue can be noted throughout. For example, in some of the versions of at least four variants (*Pretty Fair Maid*, *Lovely Nancy*, *The Test of Love*, and *The Broken Token*), these lines describing the disclosure of the ring are found:

He drew his hands out of his pockets  
His fingers being both long and small  
This is the ring you placed upon here  
And down at his feet she did fall.

There is no doubt that a most vital element in any folksong or ballad is the melody to which it is sung. This writer's lack of familiarity with musical composition and theory, however, demands that he humbly acknowledge his inability to deal with this consideration while he patiently awaits some companion research by a capable musicologist.

#### PARALLELS—CONTINENTAL, LITERARY, AND RELATED THEMES

Barry, in describing the *Disguised Lover* theme in a Journal article in 1909,<sup>9</sup> considered it to be one of the oldest as well as one of the most widespread of ballad motifs. He refers to a German parallel from which he presents two stanzas—

"Gestern war's drei wochen über sieben Jahr,  
Da mein feins Liebschen ausgewandert war."  
"Gestern bin ich geritten durch eime Stadt,  
Da dein feins Liebschen hat Hochzeit gehabt."  
"Was thust du ihm denn wünschen,  
Das er nicht gehalten seine Treu?"  
"Ich ünsche ihm so viel gute Zeit,  
So viel wie Sand am Meere breit."

—(Wunderhorn—P. 38, edit. by Etlinger.)

<sup>9</sup>Phillips Barry. "Irish Come-All-Ye's" *Journal of American Folklore*. Vol. 22 (1909), Pp. 374-88.

Another German variant to the theme was published in *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde*. A Hessian folksong, it features most of the familiar elements—the return after absence, the retarded recognition, the test of constancy, and the production of the love token. In this ballad, the disguised lover tells the maiden that he has just come from her sweetheart's wedding and as his messenger has been empowered to return her tokens. She accepts his tale "with a flood of tears but without rancor (which in this ballad is the test of her constancy), wishing her lover . . . good instead of ill. Whereupon the lover discloses himself. . . .

"Dry up, dry up thy tearful eyne  
For of a truth shalt be mine!  
I did but try thee, to discover  
If thou would'st rage and curse thy lover!"<sup>10</sup>

The Danish *Troskabsprøven* may also treat of our theme. Child mentions this possibility in Vol. 4 of the original edition of his monumental five volume work.<sup>11</sup> And Entwistle makes reference to a related Greek ballad entitled *The Lover's Return* in which a husband returns to test his wife's fidelity.<sup>12</sup> Additional Scandinavian as well as Flemish versions have also been encountered.<sup>13</sup>

Like many of the traditional ballad themes, that of the *Returned Lover* has been used frequently as the source of literary productions. The Odysseus of the Classical epic is a returned lover who, however, finds that his wife has been unfaithful to him during his absence.

In Volume Three of R. Brimley Johnson's *Popular British Ballads: Ancient and Modern* appears *The Friar of Order's Gray* by Thomas Percy (1729-1811), the English antiquarian poet. This tale relates of a friar who meets a lady pilgrim while out walking. She asks him if he has seen anything of her true love at "yon holy shrine." After listening to her description, the friar informs her that her lover is dead and has been buried. The lady breaks down in sorrow and weeps unashamedly. The friar tries to console her by telling her that it is useless to weep for what is past, that he was an unconstant lover and

<sup>10</sup>Frank Kidson. "Fair Phoebe and Her Dark-Eyed Sailor" *Journal of the Folk Song Society* Vol. 4 (No. 15), 1910, Pp. 129-32.

<sup>11</sup>Child. *op. cit.* Vol. 4 (P. 434).

<sup>12</sup>William J. Entwistle. *European Balladry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939 (P. 316).

<sup>13</sup>Lucy Broadwood. "The Young and Single Sailor" *Journal of the Folk Song Society* Vol. 4 (No. 15), 1910, Pp. 127-29.

had been false. But she counters this with the assertion that her lover was ever true and that she will continue her pilgrimage. Whereupon the friar reveals himself to be her true lover and says that he had turned to the priesthood because he thought he would not be able to win her. They are thus reunited—

"Now farewell grief, and welcome joy  
Once more unto my heart,  
For since I have found thee, lovely youth,  
We never more will part."<sup>17a</sup>

The Percy Collection of Broad-sides and Garlands (in the Harvard College Library—Vol. III—Folio. 64) contains *The Valiant Seaman's Return to His Love*, to which we shall return for consideration later in this paper. In a second broadside in this same collection (Folio. 79), John Gay's *Black-Eyed Susan* is developed into a series of "return-and-test" episodes, beginning with *William and Susan*, proceeding to *Sweet William's Return to His Dear Susan* and ending with *Sweet Susan's Loyalty*.<sup>81a</sup>

The Scottish poet, Robert Burns rewrote and adapted many songs for publication in Thompson's *Scottish Airs*.<sup>118</sup> In a letter to this writer, Ernest Horn of the State University of Iowa wonders whether *The Soldier's Return* represents a rewriting of a ballad which Burns had actually found. "I know of no evidence that this is so," he writes, "but I would make a small wager that this would be found to be the fact if the evidence for or against this guess could be discovered."<sup>252</sup>

*The Jovial Tinker* which appears in Ritson's *Ancient Songs and Ballads* (Vol. 2, P. 64ff) was selected and put together by the editor (Ritson) from several fragments of ancient ballads. Some of these were taken from Beaumont and Fletcher and possibly Shakespeare. The collective ballad, definitely literary in style, tells of a tinker who comes across a maid in his wanderings. She inquires if he has seen anything of her true love. Informing her that he is untrue and has forsaken her, the tinker proposes that he will make her happy if she will go with him. But she will remain faithful to her lover and prepares to ride forth through the world to seek him. The tinker then removes his garment and reveals his true identity.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Richard Brimley-Johnson. *Popular British Ballads*. London, 1894. Vol. II (Pp. 10-15).

<sup>15</sup>W. Roy MacKenzie. *Ballads and Songs . . . op. cit.* (P. 168).

<sup>16</sup>(George) Thomson's *Select Collection of Scottish Airs*, London, 1803-05.

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Ritson. *Ancient Songs and Ballads*. London, 1829, Vol. 2.

Interesting, too, are the related ballads. Belden<sup>14a</sup> refers to the *Young Johnny* or *Jacky Tar* ballads in which the hero returns home poor and is slighted by the maiden. Upon the revelation of his true wealth, however, the maiden changes her attitude toward him but is rebuked for her unfaithfulness. Then there is the theme of the returned hero who finds his love married to another at the command of her father, and in his bitterness, condemns all women for their fickleness (*Early in the Spring*). The *Ballad of Hind Horn* (Child #15) is sufficiently well-known to preclude discussion. *The Faultless Bride* and *Annie Girl* (the latter from Mississippi)<sup>19</sup> are other related variants.

### ORIGIN AND SPREAD

Like most ballads of the folk variety, the origin of the Disguised Lover theme lies in obscurity. Most of the separate variants known to the writer have equally mysterious beginnings. There is reason to assume that the original theme and perhaps the earliest variants (whatever they may have been) were the individual creations of gifted folk artists whose songs were popular enough to be accepted and transmitted by their neighbors. However, this writer is convinced that, by and large, most of the ballad variants as they have reached modern collectors through the folk medium are popular adaptations of literary productions created in the polished metrical styles of the times by professional ballad writers and issued to the general public in printed editions by ballad publishers. From these literary sources, the variants were undoubtedly diffused down to the folk who adapted them to their peculiar modes of expression, altering them to suit their less sophisticated understanding of human nature and transmitting them through the oral medium to successive generations.

In the last analysis, however, "the important thing to discover about a particular song is not where and how it started . . . but what has happened to it since it was launched on the tide of oral tradition."<sup>21</sup> Of this we are just as ignorant as of the original creation of

<sup>14a</sup>Henry M. Belden. "Popular Song in Missouri: The Returned Lover" *Archiv für das Studium der neuen Sprachen und Literaturen* Vol. 120 (1908), Pp. 62-71.

<sup>19</sup>Arthur Palmer Hudson. *Folksongs of Mississippi* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, (pp. 151-52).

<sup>20</sup>Gordon Hall Gerould. *op. cit.* (P. 252).

<sup>21</sup>Phillips Barry. *op. cit.*

most of the *Disguised Lover* variants. We can say, however, that the spread of this theme and its many variants among the English speaking folk is quite considerable.

Versions of most of the variants have been found by collectors on both sides of the Atlantic. Some variants themselves, however, appear to be peculiar only to certain sections of the United States or England. *Johnny Germany* and *The Banks of Brandywine*, for example, have never been found outside of the United States, with the exception of a version or two in Nova Scotia. *William Hall*, although like the others, of possible British broadside origin, has never been located beyond the continental limits of our country. *Billy MaHone* which may possibly be a version of *The Dark-Eyed Sailor* or of Irish origin, had been collected only in Virginia by the late Dorothy Scarborough.<sup>104</sup> Barry in 1909 published *The Test of Love* as an Irish Come-all-ye ballad. Although not Irish in origin, he exclaimed, it has nevertheless been sung among the Irish population of large cities in the Eastern United States.<sup>22</sup>

Ballads as yet found only in the British Isles are comparatively few. *The Wealthy Farmer's Son*, *Beautiful Nancy*, *The Broken Token*, *The New Slain Knight*, and *Cairn-o'-Mount* have no counterparts in the Western Hemisphere. Canadian versions of several British variants have been found. *Donald's Return to Glencoe* and *The Lady of the Lake* have been found in Nova Scotia as well as in various places in the British Isles. *Glencoe*, one of the most widespread of the variants among the English-speaking people, has been sung by Scotsmen, Irishmen, Englishmen, and men from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland (as well as by folk singers in New York, Missouri, Michigan, and Utah.) *The Plains of Waterloo*, though possibly native to England, has come to this writer's attention only through his perusal of ballad collections from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. A Nova Scotia variant, *Lovely Nancy*, has also, to this writer's knowledge, never been found elsewhere.

Although the *Disguised Lover* theme in some variant or another is undoubtedly part of the folklore of every state in the United States, the writer is personally aware of only thirty-one states in which versions have actually been found. One ballad—*The Pretty Fair Maid*—has been uncovered by collectors in at least twenty-three states, as well as in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Nova Scotia. *William Hall*—the next most wide-spread variant found in the United States—is represented in the folk music collections of sixteen states.

## CONCLUSION

Whether a particular item is accepted by the folk and becomes a part of their cultural heritage depends on the extent of its meaningfulness to them and the role it is expected to play for them in the expression of culturally relevant attitudes, feelings, and values. For example, in order for such a theme as that which we have been considering to become nearly universally popular among the folk, it must have expressed something particularly important to them or represented some highly valued experience in their expressive life. Romantic constancy and steadfast loyalty are among the highest of common virtues among Anglo-Saxon peoples, greatly revered if not dynamically upheld. To sing about it, no less than to live according to it, is the moral obligation of every "fair young maiden." Is is not surprising, therefore, that it is taken so seriously by many folk singers of both sexes and for them often becomes the expression of a living experience.

True love affairs, no less than accounts of local tragedies and adventures, have always been popular themes for folk transmission and they are sung over and over again by sensitive persons who never tire of catchy melodies, poignant lyrics, or moral teachings. This is particularly true of the *Disguised Lover* variants for they ever increase in popularity among the folk and the surprise ending is eagerly awaited though everybody knows how it will turn out.

*University of North Carolina*

## LIST OF THE TWENTY-FIVE VARIANTS

1. Pretty Fair Maid
2. William Hall
3. The Banks of Claudie
4. Fair Phoebe and Her Dark-Eyed Sailor
5. 'John Riley
6. Mary and Willie
7. Donald's Return to Glencoe
8. The Mantle So Green
9. Johnny Germany
10. George Reilly



11. The Prentice Boy
12. Janie on the Moor
13. Beautiful Nancy
14. A Seaman and His Love
15. The Wealthy Farmer's Son
16. The Plains of Waterloo
17. The Lady of the Lake
18. Cairn-O'-Mount
19. The Banks of the Brandywine
20. The New-Slain Knight
21. The Test of Love
22. Billy MaHone
23. Madam, I have Gold and Silver
24. Lovely Nancy
25. The Broken Token



## THE OLD FAMILY ALMANAC

by  
M. L. Story

ABOUT 3800 B. C. THE BABYLONIAN astronomers are said to have introduced the distinction between the different star groups and the twelve-fold division of the zodiac. This discovery, culminating in the present era of outer-space exploration, has not yet seriously minimized a widespread study of and an apparent obsession to the zodiac's mystic signs. A dozen or more widely circulated almanacs, and literally hundreds of calendars, are assiduously preserving an up-to-date record of these phenomena.

Such traditional publications, while renewed annually, remain individualistic and unchanged. They are, by their very nature, both comfortably nostalgic and realistically forward looking. Many almanacs have distinct personalities of their own and appear happily with each new year as the most familiar of old friends. Almanacs are, in fact, so basic an institution in America that every schoolboy is aware that they once shared the fireplace mantle only with the Bible and that, from Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac* to John Kieran's *Information Please Almanac*, they have played a curiously personal and continuing role in our cultural life.

Before we examine the current crop, let us consider the significance of a rather definite increase in their popularity in recent years. They have appeared in ever-increasing stacks in newsstands, drug stores, and seed houses in the last two or three years and have definitely circulated more widely than the best-selling books and magazines. We may only conclude that some unconscious protest against modernity or some comforting regression to older, more blissful concepts of nature is in operation. In any event, vestiges of an older outlook are being revived, and urban populations are apparently showing a keen interest in these publications which were once directed almost wholly to our rural contingent. The *Ford Almanac* seems actually to be directed to the suburban dweller or dilettante farmer and, as such, it is a sort of scientific or hybrid modernization of the old standard publication in the field. It is to the conventional and authentic examples that we wish to turn in a fitting quest for the familiar idiosyncracies and the interesting, ancient lore of the true almanac.

In its 167th year of continuous publication *The Old Farmer's Almanac* by Robert B. Thomas appears regularly on the newsstands. It is published by Yankee, Inc., Dublin, N. H., and distributed by Pocket Books, Inc. Preserving an intricate woodcut on the cover depicting the four seasons and highlighting its founder and Benjamin Franklin, it is indeed a happy combination of ancient and modern wisdom. The title page indicates its vast scope in the phrase "continuing, besides the large number of Astronomical Calculations and the Farmer's Calendar for a variety of new, useful, and entertaining matter." Its calendar-page poetry for the current year, which is excellent, is taken from a 1783 almanac. The editors make an honest concession to an age of science by proclaiming that "such superstitions of course have no sensible value" but dutifully give the best signs indicated by the influence of the moon and the zodiac for fishermen, planters, brush cutters ("the full and last quarters of the moon"), post setters, women wanting permanent waves, and tooth extraction. Besides a wealth of anecdotes, puzzles, and contests, it contains an endless variety of helpful tables ranging from historic dates and lists of saints and angels to postal regulations and reproduction cycles and gestation rates in animals. In a chatty letter to patrons Robert B. Thomas acknowledges a request by a reader for a page giving marital requirements in the various states by saying, "If we may judge from observation, in most we would say these consist only in being able to boast of one good eye, a Social Security check, and the ability to stand up during the ceremony." It is notable that this almanac was issued not only for the regular "Year of our Lord 1959," but for "Atomic Year 15."

*Grier's Almanac*, first issued in 1807, is published by Grier's Almanac Publishing Company, Atlanta, Georgia "for the states of Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Mississippi." Its opening essay on the zodiac explains its ancient origin and is also at some pains to remind readers that the signs of the zodiac have moved backward along the path of the sun as the years have passed. As it states, "This means that the Sign Taurus now contains the constellation Aries, etc." *Grier's Almanac* assures its readers that it uses the original astrological calculations and not the constellations. This almanac contains Wright's Fishing Calendar and assorted tables and charts on subjects ranging from children's illnesses to the number of nails required in building and including a lengthy listing of helpful government pub-

lications. Articles on "Mental Health Progress," "In Business at Home," "Tractor Safety Rules," "Care of the Silo" are typical of many helpful features. In addition to the usual weather forecasts, planting guide, and astronomical summary, it localizes such information as State officers and a court calendar for the particular state in which it is distributed. *Grier's Almanac* preserves a certain decorum and is completely serious in tone and content.

In contrast, *Blum's Farmer's and Planter's Almanac*, in its 131st year of publication, is literally chock-full of jokes, yarns, anecdotes, and tall tales. Published and sold by Blum's Almanac Syndicate, Winston Salem, North Carolina, it contains Coble's Fishing Calendar and such helpful articles as "Easy to Build a Patio," "Theodore Roosevelt's Nine Reasons for Going to Church," "Breathe Deeply and Live Longer," and "It's Easy to Grow African Violets." Recipes range from "Grandma's Peach Butter" to "Shoe-Fly Pie (Labanon Valley Recipe)." Lengthy planting tables are supplemented by charts of postal rates, officials of various southern states, and first-aid measures. It is replete with brief departments such as "Advice to Teen-Agers" ("Your parents do not owe you entertainment"), "Handy Suggestions" ("Add a touch of colorless nail polish to the center of each button after sewing it on and it will stay there"), "Poultry Notes" ("Nine out of ten broiler growers do not provide enough water space"), "Did You Know?" ("That a honeybee can vibrate its wings 440 times a minute") "Fun Time" ("Stockings that run are on their last legs"), and "Wise Sayings" ("If you must drown yourself, pull off your clothes; they may fit your wife's second husband.") *Blum's Farmer's and Planter's Almanac* is more forthright than most in its explication of the Signs of the Zodiac in relation to planting. It summarizes the particular effects of each sign ranging from Leo, which is considered the "most dry and barren sign" to Cancer which is "Moist, very fruitful, most productive of the Zodiac."

Volume 142 of the *Farmer's Almanac*, distributed by The Home Insurance Company, and published by Almanac Publishing Company, Lewiston, Maine, contains an analysis of the signs as they affect human life. In a more conventional astrological sense this almanac lists a personal horoscope and a table of "Lucky and Unlucky Days" for persons born under each sign. The editors take note that they "in no way hold astrological matters to be true" but present them "for those countless persons who hold to horoscopic ideas and believe in the signs of the zodiac as influencing their lives." Articles in the *Farmer's*

*Almanac* include "Know about Goldfish," "Who's Who aboard Ship," and "You Can Unmail a Letter." It contains Wright's Fishing Calendar and many poems, anecdotes, and tidbits such as "Capsules of Wisdom" ("A man does not have to be a bigamist to have one wife too many"), "Fine Lines" ("A wolf is a guy who knows all the ankles") and "Wife Savers" ("Keep cut flowers fresh by adding a lump of sugar to the water").

The *Garden Spot Guide and Almanac* is published in Paradise, Pennsylvania, and distributed through newsstands. It features a recipe and a photo prize contest, a household hints contest and a contest based on "Reading the Ads." It follows a more typical magazine format in presenting longer articles on such timely subjects as "The Common Cold," "Migration of Birds," and "The Adolescent in Your Family." It contains a walth of recipes and random fillers such as "White of an egg will remove chewing gum from any surface." It also contains articles on "Annual Flowering Plants" and "Trees" and tables of planting dates as a concession to the "Garden Spot" aspect of its title. Coble's Fishing Calendar is excerpted and such typical information relating to farm and garden as this advice for the month of August: "Set hens and incubators 11th to 25th, kill farm meat 4th to 11th, harvest crops 1st to 3rd and 26th to 31st, wean 13th to 20th, and transplant 4th to 11h."

The *Rexall Family Almanac and Moon Book*, distributed in drug stores, stresses health and the remedial aspects of "Simple Disorders" arranged alphabetically, as well as "First Aid" and "Drugs in World History." The periodic horoscope includes, along with a personal profile, the individual's lucky month, lucky day, lucky number, lucky stone and flower. It contains a "Farm and Garden Bulletin" for each month (March 29th and 30th, "barren days, fine for grubbing out poison ivy, briars, plant pests") as well as typical weather forecasts in which favorite descriptive terms are "unsettled" or "blustery." Tables of "Wedding Anniversaries," "Linear Measure," and "Weather Wisdom" ("Rainbows—a morning rainbow is regarded as a sign of rain, and an evening rainbow is a sign of fair weather"). The "Seed Planting Table" indicates that watermelons may be planted from March 1 to May 20 in soil that is a "rich, light loam" using 2 to 7 pounds per acre. Wright's fishing calendar is included.

*Your Pocket Almanac*, distributed on newsstands and published by Paradise Printers, Paradise, Pennsylvania, is very compact in size.

Containing no advertising, its subtitle "Handbook for Home, Shop and Farm," is implemented by such tables as "Decimal Equivalents," "Minimum Weights of Produce," "Surface Parcel Post," and "Duration and Frequency of Heat in Farm Animals in Regular Condition." Articles on "How to Remove Stains" ("Iron rust may be removed from white goods by sour milk"), "Brief Business Laws" ("A contract made with a minor, or a lunatic, is void"), and "Prevention of Accidents" ("Children should be taught not to leave their toys where they will trip the unsuspecting"). Its calendar lists flower and birthstone for each month as well as moon signs and phases. Coble's Fishing Calendar is included.

*The Ladies Birthday Almanac*, as a final example, is virtually a southern institution. Published by the Chattanooga Medicine Company, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and advertising "Cardui for Women" and "Black Draught for the whole family" it has the usual calendar and weather chart using small flags to indicate weather signals ("The Blue Flag indicates rain or snow. A Star to right of the Blue Flag indicates rain. A Dagger to the left of the Blue Flag indicates snow.") Its calendar page includes Birthday Proverbs indicated by the citing of Biblical references. Aside from its calendar, weather chart, and the usual chart of the zodiac it contains briefs like "Notable Days" and "Moonlight Nights." Every other page is devoted to advertisements of various drug products with the greater emphasis upon the two traditional products mentioned. Possibly because it is directed to women, it contains no fishing calendar or farming information.

As such various examples indicate, these modern annuals, excluding, of course, such standard references as the famed *World Almanac*, remain highly traditional and reminiscent of an older culture. They might seem outmoded in an era when television forecasts of the weather are given almost hourly from up-to-the-minute meteorological data. They are, instead, apparently flourishing as never before. Their common ingredients include the detailed calendar in its traditional tabular form, the zodiac chart with its brief explanation, astronomical data, daily weather forecasts, fishing and planting information, and the whole gamut of "kinks" and "handy information."

Usually replete with advertising, they profitably proclaim the merits of tonics, stomachics, trusses, expectorant cough syrups, rectal compounds, insect killers, itch remedies, blood builders, soothers for teething pains, liver pills, false teeth, magic fish baits, hair coloring, corn pads, liniments, and prizes or gifts in hundreds of contests and

free-trial offers. Readers are endlessly enticed to grow herbs for profit, raise rabbits or earthworms, find valuable old coins, learn to draw or paint, sell drug or clothing products, write popular songs, gain or lose weight, or free themselves from a formidable catalog of human miseries.

The ruling periods of the Twelve Signs of the Zodiac and their relation to the body continue to be a major feature and perhaps an important justification for these interesting publications. They provide a continuing rationale for much of the typical advice exchanged among fisherman, farmers, and gardeners. One may be skeptical but the moon, in its inexorable phases, maintains, as ever, a curious role in influencing the plans and decisions of many people. As various almanacs frankly indicate, these signs and omens are not vouched for. They are simply presented for that host of people who still want to know them, whatever tongue-in-check or grimly inscrutable use they may wish to make of them. Seriously, or with a smile, one may be informed any day that "I've never known fish to bite when the sign is below the waist," or "I always get a haircut when the moon is waning. It grows faster when the moon is waxing."

*Winthrop College*

## THE REVEREND PETER VINEGAR

by  
Phoebe Beckner Estes

WHEN PETER VINEGAR died in 1905, he had established in Lexington, Kentucky, and in central Kentucky as well, a reputation as the most effective and most incisive Negro preacher in the area. He was locally famous for the spectacular titles of his sermons and for the uninhibited manner of his exhortations. Within the space of a few years his story was to be both elaborated and obscured in oral tradition.

Fact and fable concerning Peter Vinegar are probably inseparable. Certainly it has been impossible, within the scope of this exploratory effort, to collect sufficient evidence for separating the man from myth. Even in the testimony of the older Lexington citizens who remember Pete there is a striking disagreement; at least one of these eye-witnesses attributes to him most of the characteristics which later generations, who had no actual knowledge of Peter, have ascribed to him as the folk preacher of traditional pattern.

Little is known about the early life of Alexander Campbell Vinegar,<sup>1</sup> nicknamed "Peter." He is believed to have been born a free man, near Midway, Kentucky, in 1842, his family being from Woodford County, Keene, Versailles, and Germantown, Kentucky. There is no record of his education, formal or otherwise. He could read and write, however; so one must assume that he did have some sort of schooling.

Peter came to Lexington a few years after the War between the States, the exact date being unknown, and was soon made the pastor of the Main Street Colored Baptist Church. He remained there for twenty years, holding regular services and preaching at revivals around the state. He then began to preach in what was known as McCleary Hall, at Main and Broadway, in downtown Lexington.<sup>2</sup> Later Vinegar held services in Lyon Hall, an old abandoned firehouse at 149 South Limestone Street.

<sup>1</sup>Alexander Campbell was the founder of the Campbellite, or Christian, Church. I was unable to locate the source of Vinegar's nickname; but informants supposed it was a reference to the Biblical Peter.

<sup>2</sup>All street names, unless otherwise identified, refer to places in Lexington, Ky.



During the last years of his life, from 1893 to 1905, when Peter had no church, he was probably more active than at any other time in his career. It was in these twelve years that Peter became known throughout the state of Kentucky as a preacher of note. Every Sunday he could be heard preaching in the Lexington courthouse yard, near the Breckinridge monument on Cheapside. He could also be found in that vicinity on court days, when he was reported to "really shine." With much gesticulation, a highly developed rhetoric, and a melodious bass voice, he was able to fascinate huge crowds of listeners. His sermons were always of a personal nature; pointing out an individual in the crowd, Pete would cry, "You, dere . . . yas sir, YOU! . . ." Then he would continue by pointing out the weaknesses of man and illustrating the glories of "de good Lawd." With ringing tones, he would speak like a "cannon-fire," often making use of the rhetorical device of repetition in order to drive his point home.

White, as well as colored, people would flock to hear him, often driving from nearby towns in order to hear Pete Vinegar deliver one of his famous sermons. An elderly Negro informant told me that "white folks liked him cuz he'd always say somethin' right. Why, de colored folk couldn't hardly hear him cuz de whites wuz always there in droves." Another informant, white, who moved to Lexington in 1897, described the Sunday scene, saying, "All the high and mighty of Lexington and central Kentucky would go to hear him; all the elite of the town were down there in their fancy carriages." There were also reports from both white and colored who claimed that their mothers would not allow them to go to town to hear Pete because of the crowds. Wherever the Reverend Vinegar spoke there was a tremendous gathering.

Peter occasionally would preach in front of the Phoenix Hotel or on East High Street, and was often seen in other parts of town. He held revivals on the outskirts of Lexington, and made extensive trips over the state and into Ohio and Indiana. His daughter recalled that he would take two-week evangelizing jaunts; and several newspapers, announcing his arrival, attest to this fact. Some of his better known revivals were held at Ruddles Mill, Bourbon County; Midway, Woodford County; Carlisle, Nicholas County; Cynthiana, Harrison County; and Lexington, Fayette County. He is reported to have gone into Indiana and Ohio for a couple of weeks at a time. (His mode of transportation is not named, but I have reports of Vinegar going to Winchester, Richmond, and other towns in central Kentucky on foot.)



Peter Vinegar was a small man—according to several estimates not over five feet four inches in stature. Many people recall him with a beard, and the only available picture of Vinegar, taken when he was a young man, shows him with a Van Dyke. His daughter, who was only nine years old at the time of her father's death, however, distinctly remembered that he was clean-shaven, although she was the possessor of the picture. One may assume, therefore, that he wore a beard during his earlier career, but probably not in his latter years.

He is described carrying his Bible, wearing "preacher clothes": a Prince Albert coat, a black hat, and a gold-topped cane. It is interesting to note the differences in the reports concerning his hat. One informant describes him wearing a "top hat," while another remembers a "big, black, flap hat." His daughter recalls that he wore a derby, and another woman claims that he wore a "stove-pipe hat." From this information, one would have to assume that Peter wore some sort of large black hat; but two other informants cannot recall ever seeing him with a hat at all.

Vingar is also reported to have worn several gold rings on his hands, and a large "rope-like" watch-chain. He apparently had "flashing gold teeth." One elderly woman distinctly remembers him wearing a gold earring, but her husband denies this.

Peter married three times, but the exact dates of the weddings are unknown. His first wife, Rosie ———, bore him two sons, John and Elijah. Ella Beasley, his second wife, was from Fayette County, Kentucky; and she bore five children: four sons (Junious, Whethers, Major, Sanford) and a daughter (Nanny). Ella died in 1896 at the birth of her youngest child, Nanny. Peter remarried, the third Mrs. Vinegar being Louise ———, from Clifton, Kentucky; she outlived her husband, and later remarried. Peter's only family survivors are some grandchildren, his last child having died in 1959; there are several Vinegars living presently in Maddoxtown, Kentucky, but there seems to be no relationship.

The city directory of Lexington lists the following residences of Peter Vinegar: 1885—8 Daly Place; 1888—16 West Cedar; 1893—45 Ballard Street; 1902—800 Driscoll. The Lexington Leader reports that he was living on Blackburn Street in 1905, but his daughter denied this, saying they lived on Driscoll at the time of his death. Interestingly, Peter's name was raised in large black capitals in the 1902 entry, recognition reserved for those of some prominence in the city.

Peter Vinegar died on Wednesday, July 19, 1905, from "paralysis and intermittent fever"<sup>3</sup> at the age of sixty-three. (According to his daughter, he was sixty-three; the newspaper obituary reported that he was "in his sixty-fifth year.") The funeral was held at the Pleasant Green Baptist Church, where Pete had done some preaching himself, with five ministers<sup>4</sup> officiating. Thousands gathered to pay final homage, and the church was reported to have been filled to its utmost capacity by ten o'clock in the morning when the body was placed in state. Over three thousand persons are reported to have appeared during the day until the body was removed at four o'clock for burial. Both white and colored were present, some estimating more whites than Negroes. "So large was the crowd which '[was] continually coming and going about the neighborhood of the church that traffic was frequently impeded. . . .'"<sup>5</sup>

A celebrated Kentucky raconteur tells of selling popcorn and soda pop at the services. He also believes that the funeral had been in Versailles, where Vinegar was buried. It is possible that he has confused Vinegar with Brother Smothers, another Negro minister of local renown, for it is known that Peter was buried in Lexington.

The services began at two in the afternoon, and from two until four, five leading colored pastors conducted the ceremony. "Many succumbed to extreme religious excitement wrought by the exhortations delivered. Cries and groans were uttered as responses to the passionate appeals of the speakers."<sup>6</sup> Vinegar's six sons acted as pallbearers; and following the services, he was removed to the Seventh Street Colored Cemetery (no. 2). The exact location of the grave is unknown, as the cemetery is now an impenetrable thicket, and all burial records were destroyed in a courthouse fire in 1925. Hundreds reportedly accompanied the hearse to the burial grounds, walking on foot or riding in carriages.

There are many conflicting opinions as to the real value and merits of Peter Vinegar as a preacher. Some report that he was a "magnificent speaker," "sincere in purpose," and a "masterful rhetorician." It is claimed that he baptized 113 people after his initial sermon, and con-

<sup>3</sup>Lexington Leader, July 20, 1905, page 3. The Frankfort Roundabout reports that Vinegar died "from the effects of age and extreme heat."

<sup>4</sup>The Reverend C. P. Bigbee of Winchester, Kentucky; W. J. Price of Maysville, Kentucky; D. W. Seales of Georgetown, Kentucky; H. W. Hawthorne and Minor Young, both of Lexington.

<sup>5</sup>Lexington Leader, July 25, 1905, page 2.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

verted over 2,000 (by some estimates, over 3,500) people during his career. This, in itself, seems to attest that Vinegar was a man of some significance. Some informants, white and Negro alike, hold the utmost respect for him and his work. One elderly Kentucky historian, who has done some preaching as a layman, reports that Vinegar was "a great preacher in spite of his ignorance." Where many point out that he was uneducated and "uncultured," they also give him credit for being a successful preacher and a "good man."

One old Negro man, who was twenty-four years of age at the time of Peter's death, says of the preacher that he had a keen insight into every situation. His sermons were clear and well-worked, poignant as well as significant. When asked about conversion, the informant replied that he had never heard of Peter actually converting anyone, "but he shore could say somethin' in dem sermons."

There are others, however, who assert that Vinegar was a "notorious exhorter," and say that he never reformed anyone. They feel that he was "popular" only because he was "entertaining" and "always good for a laugh." One informant claims that Vinegar's only interests were whiskey and women, plus "terrible cussing;" he felt the old Negro preacher was a sham, entertaining as he may have been.

Some Negroes are reluctant to speak about Pete, as they feel that he was one of those characters who invariably brand the Negro race as being shiftless, unduly emotional, "odd," and fraudulent.

All of these comments are, of course, the results of the informants' personal convictions and beliefs. Religious experience and background vary with each individual, and these recollections have probably been molded according to the individual's preferences and convictions.

As the years have progressed, the Peter Vinegar myth has grown to an interesting degree. Some people have actually "remembered" that he had been a slave in Georgia (or Tennessee or Kentucky), where, as a young man, he had his first religious work among his fellow slaves. He is then reported to have "wandered" into the city of Lexington shortly after the War between the States, penniless and alone. It is natural to assume that most Negroes were slaves before 1862, but we have no evidence that Vinegar was. It is known that Vinegar was literate, and according to many Southern state laws, no owner was allowed to instruct his slaves in reading and writing. This in itself would cast some doubt upon Vinegar's being a slave. We must therefore assume that Peter was a free man, who came to be pictured as a slave through half a century of oral tradition.

It is becoming evident that Peter Vinegar is now a part of the folk pattern. Some facts have obviously been overlooked in order to fit him into the role of a "typical" Negro preacher of the nineteenth century. There is a point where the fact fades out, and the oral tradition takes over.

According to one account, Peter's habits did not please some of his congregation at the Main Street Colored Baptist Church, and after repeated protests had been made, part of the congregation sought to oust him. The church split into factions, and Pete moved out, taking his followers with him to McCleary Hall, where he resumed his duties. Another report gives the same information, with the exception of locations. In this story it was the McCleary Hall congregation that sought to "discipline" the preacher; and Pete left there, going to the abandoned firehouse on South Limestone. An informant reports that at one time Vinegar had a church in Maddoxtown (about seven miles from Lexington), and the congregation there ran him out for similar reasons (supposedly drinking and "loose living"), sending him to the city. This sort of story about a preacher and his schismatic congregation has significantly been repeatedly reported in folk tradition.

Current oral tradition pictures Vinegar as a constant drinker. There have been several conflicting views concerning this, and it is interesting to note them.

One informant used to sell Pete a half pint of gin every morning of the year for ten cents. He claims he never saw the preacher drink, "but he shore did like that gin!" Pete would bring his own bottle and have it filled in order to "carry" him through the day. Another informant backs up this story, saying that he saw Pete purchase the gin, but never saw the preacher drunk—"jest kinda warmed up, ya know." The gin apparently followed Vinegar into the pulpit, as there are numerous reports that he would always have his "own special drinking water" which no one else could touch. There were two bottles: one for Pete, and one for the members of the congregation. Pete kept his in his back pocket, or on a shelf under the rostrum. When he was in the country preaching at the county churches, Vinegar would claim that he could not drink "dat country stuff." He was always fully equipped with his "good ole city water" in his own special bottle.

One informant pictures Vinegar as an unruly drunkard, who only cared for his profession as long as the whites kept him well supplied with whiskey. According to this gentleman, Vinegar would get so

drunk that he would start big fights; "there were at least forty fights a week." Pete is reported to have hit people on the head with his Bible, and to have "carried on" with the Elders' wives; the police would have to break up every gathering because Vinegar, being so drunk, would invariably start a brawl, involving the whole congregation. The informant asserted that "the fightin'est preacher that ever lived was ole Pete Vinegar!"

Some informants say they never saw him drinking in the pulpit, but they recall that he drank a great deal of water while preaching. When it is suggested that Pete might have been drinking gin, in the guise of water, they refuse to believe it. "No," they reply, "Pete wouldn't do a thing like that!" Still others report that Vinegar was "very dignified," "real polite," "a gentleman," "very peaceful," and "a true man of God." His daughter remarked that "he never carried a flask into any pulpit . . . he was never addicted to drink."

Most of these reports seem to bear out one testimony: that Peter was actually a heavy drinker, but because he never showed any alcoholic effects, many people were not aware of this habit. It is highly possible that because he was constantly "warmed up," his observers were not able to notice any exceptional behavior, and because the gin could easily be mistaken for water, they were never made aware of Pete's drinking.

The exact source of Pete's income is unknown; no one can recall his taking up a collection, and according to members of his family, he never did any work besides that involving his chosen profession and some occasional "doctoring." (This is significant in that folk tradition frequently associates preaching and doctoring.) While he never took up an official collection—indeed, it is reported that he frowned upon such a practice and would tell the congregation not to give him its money,—he always managed to have enough to live on and to support a growing family. Apparently his hat was always in a readily accessible spot, and some informants report that the hat would be placed on a stool in front of the congregation, where, as the people were departing, they would drop a few coins in the "plate." Another informant recalls that Pete would have someone else pass his hat in church or among the crowd, while others remember pitching money at Vinegar.

His daughter reported that Pete was financially comfortable at all times, and "made plenty of money down there on Cheapside." We

may therefore conclude from the given information that Vinegar did have access to some sort of collection taken up from his congregation and listeners.

The oral account of Vinegar's funeral has definite folk elements in it. He is supposed to have died penniless, lacking even the necessary funds for a proper burial. One narrator reports a collection being made at the Pleasant Green Baptist Church, and from over three thousand people, a total of \$32.12 was taken up.<sup>7</sup> According to him, the funeral procession was a tiny cortege of mourners, Vinegar's death passing virtually unnoticed. (The narrator seems to overlook his statement that there were approximately three thousand attending the services.) Peter was supposed to have been buried in a plain black box, with only three bouquets of flowers gracing the coffin. This story has obviously been altered to fit a folk pattern, as his daughter said that he was buried "in a fine, dark casket; and a great profusion of flowers adorned his casket." There are other reports which bear this story out. Another account of the funeral relates the story that someone in the crowd cried out in the middle of a prayer, "Mah god! Somebody's done pick-pocketed me!" This, too, is apparently dubious, but is part of the oral tradition.

Informants, having heard stories and descriptions of Peter Vinegar from their elders, picture him as being a "tall gaunt man." The folk picture of the preacher is usually that of a tall impressive figure, and it is interesting to note that within a single generation, Peter has been changed in order to fit the traditional pattern. When these informants learn that Vinegar was approximately five feet four inches tall, they are thoroughly amazed and incredulous.

Several inconsequential episodes connected with Peter Vinegar are remembered because the informers happen to recall the man. Peter is reported to have been walking along High Street, where a crap game was going on. As Pete neared the group, crouched by an old deserted building, one of the players cried out "Kill 'im on the hill!" Pete, believing the cry an intended threat against him, started running, yelling "Dey won't kill me on any ole hill!" He ran to the nearest policeman, told him that he had been threatened with death. Having gathered more supporters, Pete took them back to High Street, where they spotted the players. The police, recognizing a crap game, broke it up, arrested the men for operating an illegal game of chance, and left Vinegar to continue on his way.

<sup>7</sup>In folk narrative, numbers are usually exact, rather than rounded off.



Another story about the Negro preacher was told by an elderly man who used to run a restaurant in Lexington, on Georgetown and Main. He reports that Vinegar came in early one rainy morning to purchase ten cents worth of gin. When the owner turned to fill the bottle, Pete snatched some bacon, and slipped it under his big black raincoat. The owner handed Pete the replenished bottle, collected the fee, and then reached under the coat, retrieving the bacon, saying "Let's put the bacon back, Pete." Vinegar looked at the owner, looked at the bacon, and replied, "I'm gonna tell de Lawd on you!" When the owner questioned this remark, Pete replied "You're taking de food outa mah chillens' mouths!" An old Negro tells the same story, but sets the scene in a butcher's shop.

There is an episode related by several informants concerning one of Pete's funeral services. "Brother Howard," a Negro preacher who called for more respect of the Ten Commandments that he himself was willing to exercise, had died under circumstances that left some question as to his status as a man of God. Considering this awkward situation, none of the local ministers would agree to perform the last rites—none except Peter Vinegar. Although everyone was cognizant of "Brother Howard's" unfortunate death, Peter was able to draw a large crowd at the funeral services held at the Pleasant Green Baptist Church. The crowd was so large, in fact, that the story runs that the floor caved in, causing one of the biggest panics that ever occurred in the city of Lexington.

Some of these situations are likely to be associated with others at this point of history, but because Vinegar was in the public eye, they are more readily remembered in relation to him. He is reported to have campaigned for various political candidates,<sup>8</sup> who in turn "sponsored" him. Many preachers were active in state and local affairs in the late 1800's; so it is not unusual for Peter to be remembered in such connection, but it is significant that here, too, Vinegar has been made to conform to the nineteenth-century traditional concept of a preacher.

Some informants, where they cannot recall any special episodes, are able to remember several quotations of Pete's. When going into a new town on an evangelizing expedition, Vinegar would claim that he had "come to pour religion out of de Good Book on de sinners."

<sup>8</sup>Those persons mentioned with particular references to Peter Vinegar were Circuit Judge Frank Bullock and Police Judge John J. Riley.

When people would tease Pete, he is reported to have answered "I'm gonna tell God on you, goddam you!" Another informant remembers hearing Peter Vinegar preach at a revival at Midway, Kentucky, in 1896. The preacher kept repeating one refrain which remained in the informant's mind: "And de Lawd brought chaos outa confusion!" Still another informant remembers part of a sermon which was concerned with the day of Judgment. "Dat ole nigger would wave his arms, and suddenly cry out 'And dey're fightin' in de trenches of Damascus!" A genteman from Harrodsburg, Kentucky, quotes Vinegar, saying "I am gonna preach today on de subject of Heaven, and I will give you a definition of de Kingdom of Heaven. It's a mysterious mystery of mystified mysteries." Another informant recollects the definition as being the following: "It's a mysterious mystification of mystified mysteries." These passages are interesting in that people remember Vinegar and still retain some of his "masterful speeches" and expressions.

Although only a little of the content has been retained, the most popular and most frequent stories about Pete are directly related to his famous sermons. He had a series of homilies which were known throughout Kentucky and even into the surrounding states. There was generally a notice in the paper announcing the time and place of Pete's next appearance, plus the title of his sermon.<sup>9</sup> It is for these sermons that Peter Vinegar is remembered, and the titles are familiar to many Lexingtonians, and are sheer masterpieces in themselves.

Probably his most famous sermon was 'A Damned Hot Day.' It was so well known that the phrase "it's one of Pete's days," denoting an extremely hot day, remains a common expression in parts of Kentucky. It is reported that while Pete was making particular reference to the "fate of de sinner on de judgment day," he would take a big gulp of his "city water," and smacking his lips, would say, "Yas, mah bredern, it'll be er damned hot day!" Judgment Day was apparently Vinegar's favorite topic, and he made it powerfully vivid to all his listeners. If you are an evil man, Pete prophesied that "you'll sink to de bottom of hell with brimstone on your body and hot iron in yo'

<sup>9</sup>It is reported that the late Thomas Cromwell was responsible for publicity in the newspapers. One such announcement of Peter's services is found in the *Morning Herald*, Thursday, July 1, 1897, reading:

"Rev. Peter Vinegar will tonight at the colored camp meeting preach one of his famous sermons. 'A Dam Hot Day,' one of his series, would be appropriate [sic]."



back." But according to Vinegar, if you are a holy and righteous man, you will witness "dat great day when de sun of righteousness [will] flood de earth with rays of radiant glory and de sons of men [will] meet again de frans of bygone years; when hope will be crowned by realization and our dreams come true above all sorrow and unres'; where de streets are gold and de lan' is filled wid milk and honey."

"Watch Dat Snake" and "Hell Ain't But a Mile from Lexington" are two others of Vinegar's better known sermons. The former is said to have originated when Peter was baptizing an old colored woman in the Bolivar Street Pond. As he was about to immerse her in the water, he spied something moving in the pond several feet away. As a big fat reptile wriggled by, Pete called out "Hey dar, watch dat snake!" The next week he delivered a sermon using the same cry, warning his congregation to look out for "de devil" who was lurking everywhere. He cautioned his hearers to guard against 'de tempter within and de tempter without," and according to one informant, said "even yo' best fren oughta be watched. Yo' buddy's a snake—de man next to you may be de devil. Mah bredern, don't turn yo' back on nobody!"

This sermon became so popular that Vinegar was called upon to deliver it over and over. He was able to use it on his many jaunts, and especially at harvest time, when farmers would get Pete to preach at revivals in order to keep the hired hands interested and happy. Once some farmers in Mercer County asked Pete to come preach so that the workers would not drift away from the job. The meetings were always held at night, and on one particular evening Peter was preaching his famous sermon, "Watch Dat Snake." He was doing such a masterful job of it that he kept going all night long. One anxious farmer decided he had better fix that, so he turned a Jersey bull into the field where the revival was being held. Pete was repeating his refrain "Watch Dat Snake, mah bredern . . ." when he saw the horns of the bull headed toward the crowd. At this point he added the advice "And you'd better watch out fo' dat goddam Jersey Bull!"

By the text "Hell Ain't But a Mile from Lexington," Vinegar referred to the city work house, located on the Old Frankfort Pike. He warned his hearers against the evils and wrongdoings that would land them in the Lexington rock quarry. In 1953 an article was printed in the Lexington Leader, entitled "Peter Vinegar said Hell was But a Mile from Lexington. And Lexington has Grown Consider-

ably Since Then." This expression, although not as popular as "a damned hot day," is also in current usage, completely disassociated from Vinegar's memory.

"Take Dat Sin Outa Yo' Bosom" is another one of Pete's well-known sermons. It is reported that one Sunday Pete was preaching this particular sermon at a little church on Winslow Street (presently Euclid Avenue, or the Avenue of Champions). One of his sinners on this occasion had been coming down South Upper when he smelled an old ham. He began investigating, and presently he found a shank of ham sitting in an open window. He looked around, snatched it up, put it in his shirt, and continued down the street. Soon he saw the crowd on Winslow Street and decided to go into the church. He took his place on the front row, all the other pews being filled; and Pete began to speak. The sermon was so rousing that presently the sinner became repentant. Peter sounded forth his refrain "take dat sin outa yo' bosom" until the thief could stand it no longer. He rose and walked up to the pulpit; removing the ham-bone from his shirt, he cried, "All right, Bre'r Pete, if you's gonna make sech a fuss over it, take de damned thing!"

"When Gabriel Blow Dat Ho'n" was one of Vinegar's most spectacular sermons. One summer the newspaper announced that Peter Vinegar would speak to his congregation the following day at a picnic in the woods. The title of his sermon was to be "When Gabriel Blow Dat Ho'n." Upon learning the title, several local jokesters hired a bugler, and the next day they made him hide in a large tree near the group. When all the people had assembled from far and wide, Pete began his sermon. Then after he had all the congregation worked up in a fervor by describing the horrors of Hell and the pain of Judgment Day, and when all the picnickers were screaming "Amen, Lawd," the bulger sounded forth with a melodious strain from a song known as "Taps." The story goes that the woods were immediately vacated.

Another version of this tale comes from an elderly gentleman who remembers the incident taking place in a tent located on High Street. He reports that Vinegar kept calling out "Whata ya gonna DO when Gabriel blows dat ho'n? . . .," and the crowd kept rising in religious excitement. A bulger, having been previously informed of the text of the sermon, was sitting in the back of the tent, and after waiting for the right moment, he softly blew his horn. Peer apparently did not hear it, although three-fourths of the congregation "stopped cold." Again Vinegar put forth his poignant question, "Whata ya gonna

do. . .," and again the bugler blew his horn. This time "ole Pete" heard; and in a frantic rush for the exit, he yelled out, "Whar is yo', Gabriel, whar is yo'?"

An old Negro, upon hearing these two stories, denied their relationship with Vinegar. He believed the original was about a younger minister, a Reverend Quarles, who officiated at the Pleasant Green Baptist Church. It is interesting to note, therefore, that the story apparently exists for its value as narrative, not necessarily because of its connection with Peter Vinegar.

Although there is no record of the exact title, there is an interesting tale told about Peter's sermon preached at Zion Hill, Kentucky. One day, while holding a revival at a little town five miles from Midway, Peter announced that he would walk across Elkhorn Creek the following day, to reenact thus Jesus' miraculous feat. The story goes on to relate that Pete crept down to the creek bed late that evening, and secretly planted some boards below the surface in order to assure his success. Some local boys, spying on the Negro preacher, watched him do this and, after Vinegar returned to town, removed the boards, hiding them on the bank several yards away. Early the next morning, Peter went down by the creek and found a multitude of followers present to witness the great miracle. After a short prayer, Peter stepped "out on the water," while the first rays of morning sun clothed him in a radiant splendor. As he progressed across the creek he began sinking; he sank, and he sank, and he sank. When in the midst of Elkhorn, knee-deep in mud, Peter stopped, looked around, and called out in ringing tones "Who in the hell moved dem goddam boards?" This folk story, involving another minister, appeared in print around the turn of the century, and it is evident that here, too, a story actually told for its narrative value, has become attached to the oral tradition about Vinegar.

The origin of "Kill Old Speck" is told about Pete, his wife, and their dog. One evening Pete arrived home, bringing several unexpected guests who were visiting pastors. His wife came to the door, and to her dismay, realized that her husband had invited them to dinner. "But, Pete," she said, "We don't have enough food for all these men. . . ." "Well, hell," he replied, "Kill old Speck!" This is reported to have happened in 1900, and several weeks later Peter delivered a sermon entitled "Kill Old Speck," (or according to some informants, "Old Speck is Dead"). The exact content of this homily is unknown.

Christ, as the central figure of the Christian civilization, was exemplified as "A Wheel in der Middle of er Wheel" (or "A Wheel With in a Wheel"); and Jesus Christ and his twelve apostles were the characters in Vinegar's sermon "Thirteen Men Coming Down a Dirt Lane." In the sermon "Death in de Pot," the Negro preacher discussed the evils which arise from intemperance and over-indulgence.

Pete is reported to have preached a sermon entitled "Pearl Bryant is Dead, and Couldn't Find Her Head." On January 31, 1896, a famous murder was committed in Cincinnati, Ohio; Pearl Bryant was decapitated by a young medical student, and her head was never discovered. It is interesting to note that this murder has been made the subject of several famous American broadside ballads; Pearl Bryant, herself, becoming a part of the folk tradition.

Peter Vinegar preached many other sermons; of some only the title remains in oral tradition. The mere titles themselves are valuable in that they provide material for comparative study of preachers who have become heroes in oral tradition:

"Hold Dat Tiger"

"The Debbie [*sic*] Is a Porcupine"

"The Goneness of the Past"

"For de Bed Am Too Short, and de River Am Too Narrow"

"The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest"

"White Hoss and de Rider"

"Dry Bones in de Valley"

"Sammy Rabbi"

"Down Where de Columbine Twineth, and de Whangdoodle

Moaneth for Its Mate"

Thus Peter Vinegar, one of the best known Negro preachers in the state of Kentucky, has reached almost mythical proportions in oral tradition. His importance as a figure in Kentucky folklore seems such as to suggest that investigation should be carried further than was possible in this preliminary report.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Devil in Dog Form—A Partial Type-Index of Devil Legends.* By BARBARA ALLEN WOODS. (Berkeley: University of California Press, *University of California Publications Folklore Studies*: 11, 1959. Pp. x + 168. Paper, \$3.50.)

In her monograph, *The Devil in Dog Form*, Barbara Allen Woods has assigned a most difficult task to herself: to make a partial type-index of a motif which is elusive, and which is based on many legends with little common form. The author has carried out her assignment in a scholarly manner, basing her study on a thorough examination of the motif as she encounters it in the oral and written legends of "the whole Germanic language area" (Iceland excepted), "with supporting evidence from French, Italian, and Celtic sources." She divides her work into five chapters and gives a copious end bibliography.

Chapter one presents problems which the author encountered in making a type-index of the legends of the devil in dog form: no common form to the legends; impossibility of distinguishing the story of personal experience (*memorat*) from a traditional legend; the fluidity of legend forms—an ordinary legend (*fabulat*) may become a *memorat*, or it "may have a didactic or corroborative purpose"; and the very real problem of defining "devil"—to mention only a few.

The devil-in-dog-form stories are classified into five legend-types: (1) evil spirits (spooks) which haunt places at night; (2) the devil who punishes evil-doers; (3) the pact with the devil; (4) the devil as a ghost of the wicked which haunts the living; and (5) the guardian of a treasure, preventing greedy men from snatching the hoard from enchanted ladies.

A very helpful feature of the first chapter is the author's review of legend collections, with an evaluation of the principal ones.

"The Prince of Darkness" is the title of chapter two, which has over 30 interesting legend-types concerning spooks. Some of these legends recalled to this reviewer similar story-types found by Louis Jones in the folklore of New York State: the spooks that ride with a person in his vehicle, those which haunt houses, and those which appear at sites of accidents or murders. To each of her stories Mrs.

Woods gives a legend-type index (a number) of her own devising, and she lists a wealth of references under each.

In chapter three the author develops two more of her legend-types: "The Devil and Evil-Doers" and "The Pact With the Devil." In these types the stories serve the function of showing "the evil consequences of wrong-doing," and "specific violations of the Christian ethics." These legends are international in scope.

Chapter four presents legends of the devil in dog form in connection with his appearance at the death of wicked people. In these legends the devil is the true "Sovereign of Hell" who snatches up sinners and causes their restless souls to return as ghosts after their death. The devil as a ghost haunts the living.

In the fifth and concluding chapter, Mrs. Woods gives many German treasure legends in which the devil appears as a dog to guard the treasure. These are fantastic legends based on taboos and magic, as well as on fairy tale adventures.

The bibliography (pages 147-167) is a rich mine for the folklorist who is especially interested in Germanic and Scandinavian legend collections.

*The Devil in Dog Form* lists over two hundred legend-types of the author's "own devising." It is not entirely clear to this reviewer how the author has devised her system of classification, since she states that she does not follow J.R.W. Sinninghe's index of Dutch legend-types; neither does she use Aarne's Finnish school of classification, although, as she states it, "the classification system used here is very much in the style of the Finnish school of folklore research. . ." Perhaps her own classification system was the best under the circumstances for the legends with which she worked. Time will tell if other scholars can use her classification system in future studies of the devil legend. Folklore scholars will be inspired by Mrs. Woods' excellent treatment of the devil-in-dog-form motif to prepare other partial type-indexes of devil legends.

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*A Pioneer Songster: Texts from the Stevens-Douglas Manuscript of Western New York, 1841-1856*, edited by HAROLD W. THOMPSON, assisted by EDITH E. CUTTING. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N. Y., 1958. xxii + 203 p. \$3.50.

Harold W. Thompson, Professor of English at Cornell University, has published a collection of songs sung by Artemus Stevens of Massachusetts, who as early as 1824 made a record of some of his favorites. An informative introduction traces the history of this manuscript and the background as a result of which it came into being. Moving to Wyoming County, N. Y., in 1836, Stevens brought these songs with him. In western New York his son, Volney Stevens, and his daughter, Julia S. Stevens, wrote down almost ninety of them. Volney served with the Union forces, then moved to Kansas, where he drove stage along the Santa Fe trail, took up farming, and finally died in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1908. His manuscript was discovered some twenty years ago in Arcadia, N. Y., in an old pine chest shipped back to New York state at his death. Harry S. Douglass, the grandson of Artemus Stevens, finally came into possession of the manuscript. Douglass wrote articles describing it.

Singing schools or societies were common in Wyoming County and the other counties of western New York, then a frontier land, the first one being in the Tonowanda Valley, organized in the village of Phelps, in 1805. According to Mr. Douglass these schools were said to be the centers of social life for young and old. Families went to them by sleigh in winter. Sometimes a dance and a supper followed, especially if the meeting had been held in a school house instead of the customary church. From 1860-1880 these meetings continued and spread. Although so-called "composed songs" were sung at the meetings, the Stevens family, according to Thompson, seems to have been the only one to preserve its own favorite songs and ballads sung in the home. Unfortunately, no music for the songs appeared.

In the preparation of the present edition the editor was ably assisted by Miss Edith E. Cutting, whom he speaks of as a western New Yorker and a folklorist of training and experience with a great love for her region. She has published books and articles on the folklore of western New York and completed a master's thesis in folklore at Cornell under the direction of the editor. She has edited each song in such a way as to place it carefully in its relationship to possibly better known versions in standard collections and to other



pertinent literary and historical sources. Her introductions to individual items are quite informative for the general reader or for the collector, and yet they are not too long.

The collection is divided into three sections: Songs and Ballads from the British Isles (nine from the Childs collection, twenty more classified under the title of "love themes, three under Historical Themes, and four under Irish Themes"); American Songs and Ballads (six on love themes, three on pioneering, five on political themes, three minstrel songs, and five spirituals); Minor Groups, English and American. Ten of the songs not in the original manuscript were found later among the Douglass papers.

Of the Child ballad types two have motifs similar to a number appearing in the "Hog's Heart" and "The Knight in Green," both resembling Child 268, the editor's noting among others Motif K 512.2 (compassionate executioner, substituted heart), K 2112.1 (false tokens of wives' unfaithfulness), and N 15 (chastity wager).

Among the love ballads the theme of the returned lover who tests his sweetheart by the report that he is dead is found in "George Reilly," one of the most fully developed items in the collection. Of interest also is "The London Lawyer's Son," in which a girl, forsaking her absent lover, marries and causes the abandoned one to die of grief. After his death his ghost haunts her.

The American section includes ballads commemorating notable events in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, bearing such titles as "The Taxation of America," "Perry's Victory," "Buena Vista," which sings vehemently of the gallant American forces, the lusty "Noble Lads of Canada" and their bravery even in defeat, to name but a few of the more impressive. A miscellany made up of negro and white spirituals, several termed "tear-jerkers" by the editor, and a few on satirical and Indian themes round out the volume. Among the more striking is "Patient Joe," the religious English miner whose patience and virtue help him survive a host of troubles.

This collection was a joy to read. Many of the items were unusually fresh and interesting. Furthermore, it would be hard to find a better edited collection. The editor and his assistant have combined skillfully the results of their research—texts, parallels, historical data—into a readable whole quite distinct from what in lesser hands might have resulted in a dull, scholarly presentation. The items to which I have called attention do little more than scratch the surface of the

content. Readers will relish numbers of ballads to which space does not permit a reference. If I have succeeded in giving them a few suggestions and samples of what lies in store, I shall feel that I have had a small part in introducing a distinguished addition to our regional song and ballad literature.

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HOLGAR OLAF NYGARD. *The Ballad of Heer Halewijn. Its Forms and Variations in Western Europe. A Study of the History and Nature of a Ballad Tradition.* University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1958. 350 pages. \$5.50.

It is an onerous and challenging task which Mr. Nygard has undertaken in this full-length history of a single but many-branched ballad tradition. Concerning its subject the eminent ballad editor Child wrote many years ago: "Of all ballads this has perhaps obtained and English versions of which the most famous is *Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight*. In impressive, indeed bewildering detail, Mr. Nygard collates the narrative motifs and "verbal structure" of the scores of variants recorded in the Low Countries, in German-speaking lands, Scandinavia, France, Great Britain and America. The periphery of the tradition takes in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Poland and Hungary, only briefly treated in this book.

The Dutch or Flemish versions which give the name to the book seem to be the closest to the original song. The thematic and phrasal elements of the various German *Ulrich* and *Ulinger* analogues are meticulously compared with *Halewijn* to trace the probable peregrinations of the ballad from the Low Countries through the German areas. "It is the individualized touches," writes Nygard, "that make the Dutch ballad appear original. Only in the Dutch song, in the *Halewijn* form, does the villain attract the maid with his magic song; only in the Dutch song does the head request that the wound be smeared with a salve; only in the Dutch song does the maid carry home the head; and, finally, only in the Dutch ballad is the maid celebrated for her heroism. These specific matters certainly give the Dutch song a highly particularized and original appearance." (P. 65-66). Similar considerations are applied in the analysis of the numerous versions of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Iceland, associated with the Danish

*Kvindemorderen* published by Grundtvig. Here the relations among the clusters of variants are exceedingly complex, and the author is justifiably reluctant to make categorical statements on what might have been the original Danish form. Apparently the French and Scandinavian traditions stem from intermediate points in the passage from the Dutch to the German forms.

The French variants of *Renaud le Tueur de Femmes* take us not only to all corners of French-speaking lands in Europe but also to French Canada. They fall according to Nygard into two distinct traditions which both are represented on both sides of the Atlantic. Failure to recognize this is the main point in his criticism of the editors Doncieux and Barbeau. It is from the older of these traditions that, Nygard conjectures, the ballad passed from France into England and thence to Scotland, to take such forms as *Lady Isabel* and *the Elf-Knight* and *May Colvin*.

The author's theory is that changes undergone by the ballad in its travels through time and space resulted from the efforts of the ballad singers to rationalize the story as they lost the sense of its supernatural import. The villain was originally a being from the other world. When he became reduced to human stature, various adjustments became necessary in the narrative structure. But the author contests the theory of Iivar Kempainen which interprets the song mythically in terms of a struggle between mortal and demon, and even associates it with Lemminkainen of the Finnish *Kalevala*. Nygard is likewise skeptical of other source theories, whether the solar myth notion, the psychoanalytical theory of a primordial incest-motif, or even the Bluebeard theme. Hungry for a little humor, the reader appreciates the author's repeated citation of Grundtvig's refutation of the merman theory. If the maid escapes the merman by pushing him into a watery grave, the ballad becomes an analogue of the Wise Men of Gotham who tried to drown the eel. The author also rejects the view of Bugge espoused by Entwistle that the original source was the Biblical story of Judith and Holofernes. As he comments: "It may be gratifying to know that some ballads have identifiable sources. That *Lady Isabel* is so unattached, as it were, should not disturb us, for the ballad is still with us in all its multifarious variety."

The introductory chapter raises some interesting questions of method in ballad study. One concerns the validity of the historic-

geographic method developed by the Finnish school. While not denying its many achievements, especially in dealing with folk-tale, he utters a caveat against the excessive trust of some practitioners in percentages and statistics. This tendency is a result of the desire to ape the procedures of natural sciences. Textual criticism and folklore studies are not sciences "in the strict sense, for they are not based on theories that allow of experimental verification. . . . The better practitioners of the Finnish method assert the merely conjectural validity of their findings. And the application of common sense and intelligent assessment remain still the best method for conjectural conclusions." (P. 10). The same method that serves for folk-tales, especially in a circumscribed area like Finland and Karelia where a kind of "saturation of evidence" is available,—such a method is inadequate for ballads. For these have structural features that tend to hold in check the changes arising from oral transmission. Moreover, they often found their way into print, in broadsides and collections. Ballads thus call for special handling, and must be read *in toto* and in the original tongues, not studied in abstracts of folk-tale motifs. This special handling Mr. Nygard certainly has carried out in the case of *Halewijn*. One is therefore struck by an inconsistency between his critique of "pseudo-science" just cited and the following statement from his foreword: "The richness of the record, the breadth of spread of the story, the many involutions of change . . . provide the investigator with an excellent laboratory sample of ballad tradition, and every investigator is afforded ample room for his experimentations. . . ." This is precisely what the author says is not possible in textual criticism! He thus gives an example *in propria persona* of the contagious effect of these catchwords, but fortunately the body of his work is free from it.

It must be left to specialists in the field (the reviewer is not one) to weigh the particular judgments and check the accuracy of the treatment. For this critical weighing, the author has provided abundant materials, painstakingly arranged and catalogued with detailed references. The incidental discussions of the views and practices of all the many collectors and scholars who have worked on the ballad in its different variations make this book of the utmost interest not only for specialists but also for any moderately informed general reader. For such a purpose an index would be useful. The printing seems relatively free from errors—certainly those that could be identified by a non-specialist are few. (P. 8, *forces* for *forced*). To take one group-

ing: without access to the collections the reader could only wonder about the following orthographies: p. 206, "je meure"; p. 207, "Buvez le lait de vos blancs *seines*"; ". . . eau qui est *ci* pur"; p. 210, "morchoir"; p. 239, "qu'il yat au fond"; p. 241, "je me soucis"; p. 246, "ils s'en *song* allés." Even if these are all errata, and I am not sure they all deviate from the collectors' spellings, they suggest how taxing a job the proof-reading and printing was, and how carefully it was done.

REINO VIRTANEN

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*The Tales of the "Gesta Romanorum,"* Translated from the Latin by CHARLES SWAN. Revised by WYNNARD HOOPER. New York: Everest Books, 1959. Pp. 349.

It was at once gratifying and distressing to examine this recent edition of the medieval exemplum collection known as the *Gesta Romanorum*. The present volume merely reproduces the Reverend Swan's translation which first appeared in 1824, revised and corrected by Wynnard Hooper in 1877. It suffers from the omission of Swan's Introduction containing tales found in the English *Gesta* but not in Continental versions, the now somewhat venerable tone of the translation as well as the capricious if not cavalier emendation of certain of Swan's notes. Clearly, the publishers did not have in view a strictly scholarly audience. However, with the Swan translation last printed in 1905, it is perhaps significant that a sufficient segment of the reading public today may justify the capital risk involved in this re-edition.

In its original form the *Gesta* is familiar to specialists of tale literature as ". . . a collection of Latin narratives drawn from oriental apologues, monkish legends, classical stories, popular traditions, and furnished with apposite moralizations . . ." (J. Mosher, *The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England* (New York, 1911), p. 79). Presumably it furnished to preachers or to monastic societies entertaining tales accompanied by allegorical expositions of a theological or moralistic nature. From the 166 manuscripts uncovered by Oesterley, plus some 40 more by J. -Th. Welter, one assumes that the primitive form of the collection first appeared late in the thirteenth or early fourteenth century. Although the authorship ascribed by War-

ton and Sir Frederick Madden to a Benedictine monk, Pierre Berscheur, was rejected by Swan and Oesterley in favor of an English compiler, the problem of the geographical origin of the collection remains in question. (See M. Kripensky, "Quelques remarques relatives à l'histoire des *Gesta Romanorum*, "Le Moyen Age, 2<sup>e</sup> série, t. XV (Paris, 1911), 307-321, 346-367.)

Swan's translation of 181 stories is based on the Henry Gran edition (Hagenau, 1508). On the whole his translations appear to follow with reasonable if not chaste fidelity the Latin originals. Several modifications, however, seem of dubious merit today. The denouement of tale XXVIII, for example, (the weeping bitch story) was resolved by Swan "for moral reasons" by the husband's murder of his unfaithful wife and lover, a termination happily corrected by Hooper (p. 62). More serious is the abridgement, beginning with tale IX, of the apposed allegorical moralizations. By these latter omissions Swan perpetuated, unwittingly perhaps, the secular displacement of the religious exemplum already apparent in the evolution of the genre by the late Middle Ages. Granted these epilogues may bore a casual reader, their exclusion does not aid the researcher who is forced to consult the more complete EETS editions or the Latin version published by Oesterley.

If the present re-edition is grossly inadequate for scholarly purposes, its appearance may kindle a revival of interest in this important collection of exempla, a revival long overdue.

R. L. FRAUTSCHI

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*American Folklore.* By RICHARD M. DORSON. The University of Chicago Press, 1959. ix, 328 pp. \$4.50.

Professor Dorson has succeeded admirably in writing a book for the general reader and for the more specialized folklorist. In a very compact, and yet a very readable form he has been able to present a treatise that tells what folklore is and what it is not, and few people in America are in a better position to know.

He describes the folklore and the folk cultures of various groups, choosing perhaps the most representative of these in the development of American folklore: the Pennsylvania ("Dutch") German group; the people of the Ozarks; the Spanish-Americans of New Mexico; the



Mormons of Utah; the Maine Coast Yankees; the American Negroes. The book is divided into seven sections, and each of these gives a rather full treatment to the area it discusses. The divisions are as follows: I. Colonial Folklore; II. The Rise of Native Folk Humor; III. Regional Folk Cultures; IV. Immigrant Folklore; V. The Negro; VI. A Gallery of Folk Heroes; and VII. Modern Folklore. He attempts, then, to follow the course of folklore in the New World, or at least in the area covered by the United States, from its beginnings (not neglecting the folklore of the aboriginal inhabitants) right up to the present time.

The material in *American Folklore* is of particular interest, for it shows how very old folk ideas are preserved in modern garb. The folktales of the big city, of the GI, of the college student, in short, of the world as it is today make fascinating reading and drive home to the reader how folklore is something that goes on and on, not only from the past, but into the present.

*American Folklore* belongs to the series known as The Chicago History of American Civilization, which is too well known to be described. It will find enthusiastic readers, this reviewer feels, among scholars, teachers, and general readers.

J.E.K.

*Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898.* By D. K. WILGUS. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1959. xx, 466 pp. \$7.50.

"At the same time broader and narrower" than S. B. Hustvedt's *Ballad Criticism in Scandinavia and Great Britain during the Eighteenth Century* (1916) and *Ballad Books and Ballad Men* (1930), "This is a history of British and American scholarship devoted to ballads and folksongs in English" (pp. xi-xii).

The first two chapters deal with "the Ballad War"—the controversy over the communal nature of the ballad. Chapter 1 treats "the arm-chair scholars," mainly F. B. Gummere, the communalist, and his opponents, chiefly individualists, Andrew Lang, W. J. Courthope, T. F. Henderson, Gregory Smith, *et al.*, who differed among themselves but were united in their opposition to Gummere; also communal disciples such as W. M. Hart; and finally the later Lang and W. P. Ker. "The



point of diminishing returns had been reached, but a new dimension was already being added by the Emersonian scholars" (p. 52). The Emersonians believed that "The sun shines today also," and they led the way to a study of "the facts of contemporary folksinging during the period when the great collections were being built" (p. xiv) and of "all aspects of contemporary folksinging" (p. 54). They are the subject of Chapter 2. Notable among them were Cecil Sharp in England and W. W. Newell, Phillips, Barry, and H. M. Belden in America. Their constructive work is described in detail. The formation of folklore societies in the United States, the appearance of several collections of folksong, among them John A. Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910), and the emergence of such communalist disciples as Lomax, E. C. Perrow, C. Alphonso Smith, and Frank C. Brown preluded the spread of the Ballad War to these shores. The anticommunist attack found its doughtiest leader in Louise Pound. Her "view of the matter was not particularly new, nor is most of her evidence. But her attack was loud and long" (p. 89). Exchanges between Miss Pound and G. H. Gerould, the continuing melee in England and America, and "the communalist retreat" occupy the remainder of the chapter. "The most important results might be called negative" (p. 121), but the controversy "contributed its share to the growing interest in all sorts of song material recovered from tradition" (p. 122). Mr. Wilgus brings order, clarity, and a degree of vivacity into his difficult story of the Ballad War.

"Chapter 3 follows the twentieth-century collectors, examines their collections, appraises the editorial methods" (xiv). Parallels between British and American collections are recognized, but the American collections are "largely academic, literary, but nondiscriminatory," and the English collections, "esthetic, musical, but discriminatory" (123). The American collections fall into three main collecting traditions—the academic (strongly influenced by Child), the local-enthusiastic, and the musical-esthetic (144). The examination of the collections is painstakingly thorough and critical. Notable examples of judgment and tact are exhibited in the accounts of Lomax's handling of his materials (158 ff.) and of the "various methods used by collectors to prod the memories of singers" (203). The collections of Sharp, J. H. Cox, Vance Randolph, Phillips Barry, and the Lomaxes are discussed in considerable detail. Patterns of arrangement and criteria of inclusion of these and other collections are analyzed. There is an

account of the Archive of American Folksong. Recent trends in Anglo-American collections include discovery of industrial folksongs, as distinguished from occupational songs (226), and mechanical methods of collection and presentation (disc, wire, and tape). The value and effect of commercial media of presentation and the great folksong recording enterprises are appraised. The prospect for making good our lack of published collections of bawdy songs is announced.

Scholarship devoted to classification, analysis, and critical history of Anglo-American folksongs, and the place of folksong in folk culture is the subject of the fourth chapter. Cataloguing is only now under way. English attempts are briefly described. Recent attempts by G. Malcolm Laws, Tristram P. Coffin, and others are examined critically. The few analytical studies of the Child ballad are summarized. Studies of the "non-Child" ballad, of native American ballads, of individual Child ballads, and of other types of folksong (notably the playparty song, the religious folksong, and the worksong) are characterized. In the admirable account of studies of folk tunes two inter-related approaches are explained and illustrated. Finally, studies of "the place of folksong in its setting and how it functions as a part of a social group" are sketched.

The study is rounded out with an appendix on "The Negro-White Spiritual" which makes an illuminating and objective exposition of the scholarship on that controversial subject.

"A Selective Discography of Folk Music Performances on Long-Playing Records," copious and discriminating "Notes," "Selected Bibliography," "Glossary," and "Index" complete the book.

Quoting B. H. Bronson's judgment of Child's volumes—"So far as he carried it out, his work is complete and sufficient, and will never have to be redone"—Mr. Wilgus states (p. 336) that this judgment applies to Mr. Bronson's *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*. The judgment also applies to Mr. Wilgus' *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898*. In command of scholarship, critical judgment, organization, and style it is a definitive and an authoritative piece of work. It is rich, honest, lively, and imaginative. It will be of great value to students, teachers, researchers, and curious and intelligent laymen.

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## THE CHICAGO FOLKLORE PRIZE

The Chicago Folklore Prize was established by the International Folklore Association and is awarded annually by the University of Chicago for an important contribution to the study of folklore. Students, candidates for higher degrees, and established scholars may compete for the Prize. The contribution may be a monograph, thesis, essay, article, or a collection of materials. No restriction is placed on the contestant's choice of topic or selection of material: the term "folklore" is here used in its broadest sense (*e.g.*, American, European, etc., folklore; anthropological, literary, religious, etc., folklore).

It is permissible to submit material which has appeared in print, provided that such material be submitted within one year from the time of publication. The successful contestant who submits material in typed form and has this material published subsequently, is expected to send a copy of the printed monograph, etc., to the University of Chicago, for the library. Sufficient postage should be included if the contestant wishes to have his material returned. Monographs and collections, etc., must be submitted before *April 15, 1960* to the Chairman of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literature, The University of Chicago, 1050 East 59th Street, Chicago 37, Illinois. The Chicago Folklore Prize is a cash award of about \$50.—The recipient's name is published in the Convocation Statement in June.





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